

HOW CAN WE IMPROVE RACE RELATIONS?

Mr. Chairman, members of the Optimist's Club, and friends, I find pleasure in being with you today and discussing a topic of vital importance. I have been keenly enthusiastic about coming here, particularly because of the walks of life that I understand the members of the Optimist's Club come from. Your membership is composed of a pivotal group in the population of our community. You are an important group, and I find pleasure in the contemplation of the wise and sane actions that you may take as a group or individually, toward improving race relations.

You see, the topic assigned to me is "How Can We Improve Race Relations?", and OTIMISTICALLY, I am already contemplating some noteworthy results from our deliberations today.

My field of work is INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS, and as Industrial Relations Secretary of the New Jersey Urban League, I have been called into innumerable plants and businesses in northern New Jersey, to consult on industrial relations problems. In such consultation service my first approach is to analyze the problem, or problems. The analysis almost always discloses some important contributory factors that have been overlooked up to the time of the analysis, but without the recognition of which, no thorough-going solution could be had.

I think it necessary, therefore, for us to analyze briefly two important factors that are at the roots of our discussion today. The two factors I speak of are: (1) what we understand Race Relations

to mean; and (2) what we consider Improvement of Race Relations to mean. OPTIMISTICALLY, let us have a "meeting of the minds".

Long work toward the interest our topic involves, has produced the recognition of the relations between all races, as the gamut of our first factor - the two words, race relations. Out of a total population of 4,041,334 in this state in 1930, there were 844,442 Foreign-born White residents. In 1940 the population of the state was 4,160,165 - 94.5% white, 5.5% Negro and 0.1% of other races (Chinese, Indian, Japanese, Filipino, etc.) In 1940 only 82.3% of the total white population was born in this country of native or Foreign or mixed parentage; while 98.6% of the total Negro population was born in this country of native or foreign or mixed parentage. And it is important to note that only 6.5% of the Negro population was of foreign stock, while 93.5% of the white population was of foreign stock.

These figures show that practically every Negro you see on the streets today was born in this country, and his parents were also. Almost the opposite is true of the white people you see each day on the streets.

The most interesting part of the picture these facts present, is the fact that all the white population in this state gets along quite well together with about 35 nationality strains influencing the attitudes and personalities of the white population. The relationships between individuals in the white population do not cause

frustrating or dangerous conditions. The fact that the parents of about five of every ten white persons in the state, speak a foreign language better than they can speak English, does not cause widespread discrimination against those five. They can move about in whatever walks of life they wish, in direct proportion, intelligence, training, and the pleasantness of their personalities.

This is not true of the relationships between all of these different white people, and Negroes. As soon as a citizen in this state is recognized as a Negro, a different condition of freedom arises. Movement through opportunities to earn a living wage is restricted. The opportunity to live in clean healthful surroundings with proper cooperation from the Health and Sanitation departments of our communities is ignored where Negro communities are concerned. And, perhaps worst of all, there is little opportunity for a Negro child to grow to adulthood without the scars of discrimination from whites because of his color. As Hitler conditioned Nazi youth, and warped their young lives, so in New Jersey Negro youth are squeezed by all the manifestations of discrimination and segregation against all Negroes in the state. The result is frequent absence of the hope to succeed, to live fully with increasing maturity. Instead, too many Negro youth are conditioned by circumstances to believe deeply that no matter what smiles they receive for a moment, that the smile has a big stick, or insincerity behind it; that no matter how hard they work in a business on "Main Street", they

can never become the Manager, or Vice-President in Charge of Operations.

We see, therefore, that by "Race Relations" we mean the relations between those in our population of the white race, the black race, the brown race, the red race, and the yellow race. We usually mean ethnic and/or nationality groups also, particularly in America.

Now, what do we consider "improvement" of race relations to mean? Well, I am sure that the members of the Optimist's Club have made so many improvements of various sorts, that we may assume agreement on the idea of making a bad situation better. The trouble is, that "better" is a comparative term, and we need to agree on what is "better".

Do we think it better to improve race relations through attempts to outlaw discrimination against minority groups in Employment, by such measures as a permanent Fair Employment Practices Committee? Do we think it better to leave it up to every employer of eight or more persons, to hire whom he likes, saying that elimination of widespread discrimination against minority groups takes a LONG time and that it should come about when the love of God has made mankind better?

Do we think it better to make sure that Negro physicians can pursue their internship in our tax-supported, or private, hospitals so they can better serve persons who are ill? Or do we think it

better to ignore the breadth and quality of training Negro physicians can get in our state, and not care when ex-patients of those physicians have a recurrence of their illness and perhaps endanger the lives of even your own family?

In other words, do we think it better to, once and for all time, definitely stop the utter wastage and loss of valuable energy that arises from continuance of discrimination against members of minority groups? Or, do we think it better to subtly and/or openly fan the fire of discrimination, so that we will always have an interesting subject that we can discuss over and over again, and get a good grand feeling of magnificent liberality?

Our question is: "How Can We Improve Race Relations?"

The answer is: We can improve race relations by following the rules of good sportsmanship.

In 1940, the Negro population of the state was 5.5% of the total. In Newark the Negro population was 10.6% of the total. In Essex County the Negro population ranged from 17% in Montclair to 0.1% in Irvington. The percentage for Essex county was 8.2%. The percentage of Negro population in Mercer County was, in 1940, 7.0%. In other words, the majority of the people in Trenton, the County, and the state are white. The people who control the largest, the oldest, and the most important industries and business houses in the state, are white people. The people who control all the government services are white. The richest people in the state,

and thus those able to exert the most expeditious pressures, are white. It doesn't even just happen that a Negro controls or a group of Negroes control any one means of decent living in our state or emotional security. And the answer certainly does not mean that Negroes should become a majority of the population. The population increase of individual Negroes is in direct proportion to their economic and social status - as is the case with white people.

The answer doesn't lie in increased Negro population to compete in numbers with white people. The answer lies, rather, in real sportsmanship on the part of the white population. Particularly on the part of the white people who control or influence the opportunities for earning a living wage, and the amount of cultural or social development that workers or large groups of workers can enjoy.

We in America do have something that causes us to condemn (in our thoughtful moments) the person or persons who kick a person while he is down, and helpless. We can improve race relations by allowing this same something to keep those who have the power to hire or fire, to hire or fire Negroes on exactly the same basis as whites are hired and fired. We can improve race relations by demonstration, help Negroes to come to the realization that they are being treated on the same basis of any white people with the same intelligence, training, and pleasantness of personalities. When Negroes can feel that the extension of kind offices from

white people, is sincere and not temporary, then truly better racial relations will have been established.

On Monday of this week I received a telephone call from a manufacturing concern in Essex County. The Chamber of Commerce of which he was a member had suggested that he request the aid of the Industrial Relations Department of the New Jersey Urban League, in solving several problems the company is experiencing. I went to the company on Tuesday afternoon, and after spending two hours talking with the President, two members of his staff, and observing workers and operations throughout the plant, the first conclusion was that the selection of workers was poor. One of my first recommendations to this company will be that a change in method of selection of workers be made.

Two persons are responsible for hiring in this company. A woman hires females, a man hires the male workers. Neither of these persons has a grasp of proper evaluation of Negro applicants. On the other hand, their selection from white applicants is good. All the interest of the President, in demanding that Negro applicants be accepted as well as white, was in danger of being lost because a telling number of the Negro workers were unsuitable for work of the type they were placed on. Good race relations in the plant were deteriorating because of this bad situation.

Good race relations can be re-established in that plant by acquiring the services of a competent person in the personnel

department, who has had experience with as many types of Negroes as whites, who has had wide enough experience with workers, Negro and white, to be able to blend a good working force in the various departments, and whose background clearly indicates his ability in the field of Personnel.

We come now to the last, though not least important part of this discussion. Namely, the idea that if we are to improve race relations we must know exactly what Negroes want. Since the problem between blacks and whites is the most acute problem of race relations in this country, and since we want to improve race relations - particularly in Trenton and in New Jersey - we therefore need to know what aspects of relations between white people and Negroes do Negroes want changed first? Since good relations is a two-way relationship, what do Negroes consider to be most important for the establishment of good race relations here?

Here I'd like to refer to the study recently financed by the Carnegie Corporation of New York City, and edited in two volumes by the Swedish scholar, Gunnar Myrdal, and called *An American Dilemma*. This study discloses for all (and quite well too) what Negroes are most concerned about. The book states that "The white man's rank order of discrimination" is: 1 - Intermarriage; 2 - Social equality; 3 - Segregation; 4 - Political rights; 5 - Equality before law; and last, 6 - Economic equality. Myrdal says, "The Negro's own rank order is just about parallel, but inverse, to that

of the white man. The Negro resists least the discrimination on the ranks placed highest in the white man's evaluation and resents most any discrimination on the lowest level". (Pp 60-61.)

In other words, Negroes want most, that the denial of equal opportunity for economic equality, cease. Negroes want economic discrimination to cease - the discrimination that is perpetrated against Negroes when they buy property and have to pay ten to fifty per cent more than a white person is required to pay. Negroes want the opportunity to compete for higher bracket jobs, when they are qualified for such jobs. Negroes want for themselves and for their children, the choice of a vocational field on the basis of how well they can prepare for a particular field that they like, instead of having to think first of whether a Negro can get a job or make a living in that field.

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